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Annunzio

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**EPISCOPO  
& COMPANY**

*BY*

**GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO**

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*Serialized by myra L. ...*

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**NEW YORK**

**DUFFIELD & COMPANY**

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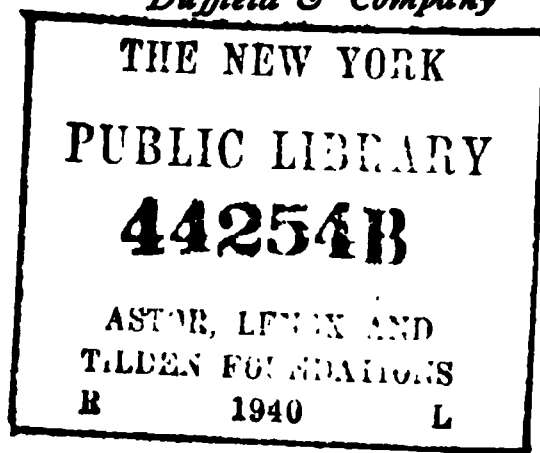
**1906**

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THE TROW PRESS, N. Y.

## Introduction

*THE name of Gabriele d'Annunzio is known to but few of those who make up the reading public in this country, and so in presenting the first translation from the work of this young Italian that has been published on this side of the water, a few words of introduction to the man and his writings seem essential.*

*With the first translations of his work into French, now several years ago, his name became known at once in all the literary circles of Europe. He has found an incomparable translator in M. d'Herelle, and is, perhaps, to-day more widely known in France than in his own country. Henry James once said of him: "He speaks so loud that one hears him well only from a distance."*

*Appearing upon their horizon as he did, at a time when the French were beginning to tire of the Humanitarian and Socialist novelists of Russia, and of the Individualist Norwegian dramatists,*

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## INTRODUCTION

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*this man, with his rare faculty of looking at life both from without and from within, won a more instant recognition than might otherwise have been his.*

*“The Romantic poet of the Italian Renaissance” — this is what Jules Lemaitre has called him — is a fresh blossoming of that genius whose bright smile has so often warmed our hearts. After the half-century of unusual sterility which lasted until the completion of Italian unity in 1870, the Italian brain began to work again, and the Peninsula became first the school of criminalologists and physiologists, and now scattered throughout the country are a number of writers of travel, of fiction, and of verse, whose work entitles them to recognition not only at home, but abroad. Edmondo de Amicis, D’Annunzio, Carducci, Fogazzaro, Rovetta, Matilde Serao, Giovanni Verga, all have international reputations. Of these men, Gabriele d’Annunzio, the poet-novelist, is the writer of greatest prominence in Italy, and some think one of the most unique figures in contemporary literature. He is not yet thirty-three years old. In 1883 he published a volume of verse, the “Canto Nuovo, l’Intermezzo di Rime,” exquisite in art, but so daringly erotic as to cause the*



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## INTRODUCTION

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*same sort of a scandal in Italy that was produced in England when Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads" first appeared. This was followed by other poems which have caused him to be ranked by so eminent a critic as M. Eugène Melchior de Vogüé as the foremost of modern Italian poets.*

*D'Annunzio has related with perfect frankness the effect upon himself of the sudden success which followed his early efforts. "Every one sought me, burned incense before me, made a god of me," he says. "I appealed especially to women. In this lay a great danger for me. Praise intoxicated me. Eager for its pleasures, I threw myself desperately into life with all my youthful ardor. I committed fault after fault. I skirted a thousand precipices. A sort of aphrodisiacal madness took hold of me. I published a little book of poems entitled 'Intermezzo di Rime,' where in plastic verse of faultless prosody I sang of all the pleasures of the flesh, with a shamelessness which I have never seen except in the freest poets of the XVI. and XVII. centuries. As was just, I began to pay for my mistakes, my dissipations, my excesses. I began to suffer with the same intensity with which I had enjoyed. Suffering made a new man of me. The works of Tolstoi and of Dostöievsky*

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## INTRODUCTION

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*helped to develop new feelings within me. And now that my art was ripe, I succeeded at once in expressing my new conception of life in a complete and organic whole, — in my novel called L' Innocente."*

*It is evident that he himself considers the novel his chosen vehicle of expression, and his have thus far been the revealers of his own interesting if not always admirable personality. He admits that his heroes are largely portraits of himself. In his latest work, the "Vergine delle Rocce," may be found a passage which expresses in a few words his attitude toward life. "Praise be to my ancestors," he says, "who, from the remote centuries, have transmitted to me their rich and fervid blood. Praise be to them, now and forever, for the glorious wounds they opened, for the glorious conflagrations they kindled, for the fair goblets they drained, for the fair garments they wore, for the fair women they enjoyed, for all their slaughters and intoxications, their extravagances and excesses, since thus they formed in me these five senses in which thou, O Beauty of the World, canst vastly and profoundly mirror thyself as in five vast and profound seas." His worship of beauty, in nature, in art, in music, is a reli-*

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## INTRODUCTION

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gion with him so far as he can be said to have a religion. His is rather a beautiful paganism, which, to use his own words once more, "indissolubly reunites art to life, art the discoverer of truth, creator of beauty, purveyor of joy."

M. de Vogüé, who has written a masterly criticism of D'Annunzio and his writings, defends himself for praising so highly works which have but a distant relation to morals by pointing out that D'Annunzio is never vulgar, that the breath of art is over all, that his works are the result of spontaneous, irresistible temperament, and not of speculation; that a Rabelais or a Boccaccio, a Loti or a D'Annunzio give expression to their own natures, and that they have nothing in common with the literary tradesmen who write to satisfy a certain public.

The three novels upon which D'Annunzio's reputation mainly rests each bears upon its title-page the words "Romances of the Rose." These are "Piacere," which appeared in 1889, "L'Innocente," in 1892, and "Trionfo della Morte," in 1894. Of the latter M. de Vogüé says that it has a right to be known as one of the master-books of our time. They are all three accessible in French, but are hardly translatable into Eng-

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## INTRODUCTION

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lish. He now promises as a sequel to these, and in contrast to them, a second series to be called "*Romances of the Lily*," — "*Don Juan Converted*," to quote M. René Doumic, — in which we may look for something upon a distinctly higher moral plane. The "*Vergine delle Rocce*," the first of the new series, has just been issued.

In the "*Trionfo delle Morte*," George Aurispa finally dies and drags Hippolyte to her death, because he "*cannot make his life correspond to his dreams*." In this book D'Annunzio succeeds where Tolstoi failed, in convincing us that sensuality leads to crime. The conclusion is as irresistible as the catastrophe in a Greek tragedy. We see as we follow the course of this story the verification of the law that a love which is purely earthly can find complete satisfaction only in death.

Of his hero D'Annunzio says, "No, his wretchedness was not caused by any human being, it came from the essence of life itself! He should have complained, not of the loved one, but of love itself. Love, toward which his whole being reached out with invincible impetuosity, love is of all the sorrows of this earth the most lamentable."

"I think you love me," says George to Hippo-

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## INTRODUCTION

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lyte ; “ but can you prove to me that to-morrow, or in a month, or in a year, you will be just as happy to be mine ? Can you prove to me that to-day, even at this very moment, you are wholly mine ? You are unknown to me. As with every other human being there is within you a world that is impenetrable to me, to which no depth of passion can give me access. Of your sensations, your sentiments, your thoughts, I know but a small part ; speech is but an imperfect sign. The soul is incommunicable. You cannot show me your soul. In our most ecstatic moments we are two, always two, separate, strangers, lonely at heart.” He is jealous even of the memories which come between this woman and himself, of the world in which she lives, of the occupations of her daily life. He tries to carry out a dream that they should go together to some spot where they can be all the universe to one another, where she can see and hear and know him and him alone. When gradually he finds that even this fails ; that his love dies ; that disgust with himself, and aversion for the woman, grow stronger day by day, — his irresistible impulse is to kill both her and himself. He cannot live with her, he cannot escape from her dominion, and so they die together.

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## INTRODUCTION

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*D'Annunzio tells us that Goethe and Shelley have been his two æsthetic gods, Paul Bourget his master in the art of writing. He has also been strongly under the dominion of Tolstoi and of Dostöievsky. "Giovanni Episcopo" shows the unmistakable influence of Dostöievsky's "Marmeladof." In fact, he is accused of flat plagiarism in France, especially of borrowing from Joséphin Peladan. His eclecticism, to call it by no stronger term, has caused his work to be compared to that of many totally different writers, to each of whom his susceptible nature undoubtedly owes much. Among them may be mentioned Baudelaire, Flaubert, Théophile Gautier, Maupassant, Catulle Mendès, and in England Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His very eclecticism makes it a difficult matter to classify him. If we judge him from some of his earlier and shorter stories, — from Episcopo itself, for instance, — we should call him a realist of the realists, and the same qualities come out in certain parts of his longer works, where the psychological bent is on the whole much stronger. His more recent works show a decided tendency toward symbolism. Their rhythmic and reiterated phrases are very suggestive of Maeterlinck.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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*The time has not come to pass a final judgment on D'Annunzio's work. But when his latest novel, "Vergine delle Rocce," is translated into English, as it is almost sure to be, it will be found to withstand two tests of really great literature; namely, that something shall survive the first reading of the book, and that it shall be impossible to read it only once.*

*MYRTA LEONORA JONES.*

*June, 1896.*





# Episcopo and Company



## PART I

You say you want to know — what do you want to know, sir? What must I tell you? What? Everything? Well, I must tell you all from the beginning!

*All* from the beginning! How can I? I no longer know; I assure you I remember nothing. How shall I do it, sir; how shall I do it?

Ah, my God, it was this way — Wait, if you please; a little patience, I beg you, because I cannot find the words; even though I could remember about it, I should not know how to tell it. When I was living among people I was taciturn, taciturn even after drinking, always —

No, no; not always. With him I talked, but only with him. Sometimes on

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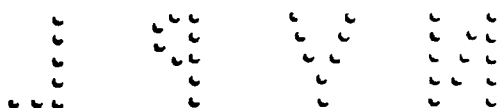
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summer nights in the suburbs, or even in the public gardens, he would put his arm in mine, his poor thin arm, so emaciated I could hardly feel it, and we would walk together discussing things.

Eleven years — think, sir, he was but eleven years old, and he argued like a man, he was sad like a man. It seemed as though he already knew life, — all of life, — and that he was suffering, always suffering. His lips were already familiar with bitter words, — words which do so much harm, and are never forgotten!

Are there people who never forget anything? As I told you, I no longer know anything, I remember nothing — Oh, that is not true!

I remember everything, everything, everything! Do you hear? I recall his words, his gestures, his look, his tears, his sighs, his cries, the most trifling peculiarities of his existence, everything from the hour he was born until the hour he died.



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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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He is dead. It is sixteen days now since he died. And I, I am still living! But I ought to die; and soon I shall die, it will be better so. My child wants me to join him. Every night he comes, sits down, looks at me. He is barefooted, poor *Ciro*! I have to strain my ears to distinguish his steps. As soon as night falls I am continually, continually on the watch; and when he puts his foot on the sill, it is as though he put it on my heart; but softly, so softly, without hurting me, light as a feather — poor soul!

Every night now he is barefooted. But believe me, never while he was alive, never did he go barefooted; never, I swear it to you.

I am going to tell you something. Pay strict attention. If any one dear to you should die, take care that he wants for nothing in his coffin. Dress him with your own hands if you can; dress him completely, carefully, as though he were to come back to life, to arise, to go forth.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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He who is about to leave this world should want for nothing — nothing. Remember that.

Well, look at these little shoes — Have you children? No. Then you cannot know, you cannot understand, what this poor little pair of shoes which have held his feet, which keep the very form of his feet, are to me. I could never tell you, no father could ever tell you, none.

At the moment when they entered the room, when they came to take me, were not all his garments there on the chair beside the bed? Why, then, did I think only of the shoes? Why did I look so anxiously under the bed for them, with the feeling that my heart would break if I did not find them? Why did I hide them as if a part of his life were left in them? Oh, you cannot understand. †

In the mornings in winter, when it came time for school, the poor child suffered from chilblains so that in winter his feet were one sore, all bleeding. It was I who

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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used to put on his shoes, who put them on myself. I knew so well! Then I used to lean down to lace them, and I would feel his hands, already trembling with cold, resting on my shoulders; and I would try to be slow — But you cannot understand.

When he died he had only one pair, the ones you see. And I took them from him. And they buried him like that, like a poor little boy. Did no one love him but his father?

And now, every night, I take those two shoes and I put them, one beside the other, on the threshold for him. Does he see them as he passes? Perhaps he sees them, but he does not touch them. Perhaps he knows that I should lose my mind if I did not find them there in their places in the morning, one beside the other.

Do you think me mad? No? I thought I saw it in your face. No, sir, I am not mad yet. What I am telling you is the truth. It is all true. The dead do re-

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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turn. He returns too, *the other*, sometimes. How horrible, oh, how horrible !

Look ; I have trembled as I do now whole nights through. My teeth have chattered in spite of me ; I have felt that terror would dislocate my bones from their joints ; I have felt, when morning came, that my hair was like needles on my head, stiff, standing on end. Is not my hair all white ? It is all white, is it not ?

Thank you, sir. You see I do not tremble now. How many days of life would you give me, judging by my looks ? You know I must die, and the sooner the better.

Yes, yes, I am calm, perfectly calm. I will tell you everything from the beginning, as you wish ; everything in order. My reason has not yet abandoned me, believe me.

Well, it was this way. It was in a house in a new part of town, a sort of common boarding-house, twelve or thirteen

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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years ago. There were twenty of us, all clerks, some young and some old. We dined together in the evening at the same hour, at the same table. We were all more or less acquainted, although we were not all from the same office. It was there where I knew Wanzer, Giulio Wanzer, twelve years ago.

Did — did you see — the corpse? Did it not seem to you that there was something extraordinary in the face, in the eyes? Ah, I forget, the eyes were closed — not both of them, however, not both. I know that well. I must die if only to rid my fingers of the feeling of that eyelid which resisted. I feel it here always, as if a bit of the skin had stuck on the spot. Look at my hand. Is it not a hand that has already begun to die? Look at it.

Yes, it is true. There is no use thinking about it. Pardon me. No. I will come to the point. Where were we? At the beginning it went so well. Then

all at once I lost myself. No doubt it is because I have been fasting, nothing else, no, nothing else. For almost two days I have eaten nothing.

I remember that formerly when my stomach was empty I had a sort of vertigo—so strange! It seemed to me that I was fainting. I saw things.

Ah, I have it. You are right. I was saying that it was there I made Wanzer's acquaintance. He ruled every one there; he oppressed every one; he would not allow any one to contradict him. He was always loud, sometimes violent. Never an evening passed without some altercation. We hated him and we feared him as a tyrant. All spoke ill of him, complained, plotted, but no sooner did he appear than the most rabid became silent. The more timid smiled on him, flattered him. What was there about this man?

I myself do not know. At the table I sat almost opposite him, and involuntarily I constantly looked at him. I felt a



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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strange sensation which I am incapable of expressing,—a mixture of repulsion and attraction, something indefinable. It was a malevolent, a very malevolent magnetism, which this strong, sanguine, brutal man exercised upon me, so weak ever since that time, and sickly and lacking in will-power; and, to conceal nothing, something of a coward.

One evening, toward the close of the meal, a dispute arose between Wanzer and a certain Ingletti, whose place was next to mine. According to his habit, Wanzer raised his voice and became angry. Ingletti, with a hardihood that came perhaps from wine, opposed him. I remained silent, almost motionless, not daring to lift my eyes, which were fixed on my plate. I felt a horrible contraction in my stomach. Suddenly Wanzer seized a glass and threw it at his antagonist. It missed him and the glass broke on my forehead, there, where you see that gash.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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As soon as I felt the warm blood on my face, I lost consciousness. When I came to, my head was bandaged. Wanzer was at my side with doleful mien; in a few words he excused himself to me. He took me back to the house, the doctor going with us; he assisted at the second dressing of the wound; he insisted upon remaining in my room until a late hour. He returned the next morning; he returned often. And this was the beginning of my slavery.

No attitude toward him was possible to me save that of a dog that is afraid. When he came to my room, he took on the air of a master. He opened my drawers, combed his hair with my comb, washed his hands in my basin, smoked my pipe, rummaged among my papers, read my letters, took away things he wanted. Every day his tyranny became more unbearable; and every day my soul grew more degraded, more cringing. I had no longer the shadow of a will; I submitted simply with-

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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out a protest. At one stroke he robbed me of all feeling of human dignity, with as much ease as he would have pulled a hair from my head.

Yet I had not grown stupid. No. I was conscious of all that I did, perfectly conscious of everything ; of my weakness, of my abjectness, and particularly of the absolute impossibility of freeing myself from the ascendancy of this man. I cannot explain to you, for example, the profound and obscure feeling which my scar aroused in me. And I cannot explain to you the extreme agitation which seized me one day when my tormentor took my head in his hands to examine this scar, still fresh and inflamed. He passed his finger over it several times and said, —

“It is perfectly closed. In a month it will have disappeared. You can thank God.”

It seemed to me, on the contrary, that from that moment I bore on my brow, not a scar, but a badge of servitude, an infa-

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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mous, conspicuous mark, which I would carry all my life.

I followed him everywhere he wished ; I waited long hours for him, in the street, in front of doorways ; I sat up nights to copy papers for him ; I carried his letters from one end of Rome to the other ; a hundred times I climbed the stairs of the Mont-de-Piété ; I ran breathless from money-lender to money-lender, to get him the money which was to be his salvation ; a hundred times I have stood behind his chair in a gambling-house until dawn, dying with fatigue and disgust, kept awake by his blasphemy and by the acrid smoke which burned my throat ; and my cough irritated him, and he blamed me for his ill-luck ; and then when we left, if he had lost, he dragged me after him like a rag, through deserted streets, in the thick fog, swearing and gesticulating, until such time as some shadow, appearing at a turn, would offer us a glass of brandy.

Ah, sir, who will unveil for me this

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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mystery before I die? Are there then on this earth men who, meeting other men, can do with them what they will, can make them their slaves? Is there then a way of taking his will away from a man, as you would take from his fingers a wisp of straw? Is that possible, sir? Why is it so?

In the presence of my persecutor *I could never exercise my will*. And yet I retained my intelligence. My mind was full of thoughts, I understood many things. There was one thing above all that I understood well; and that was that I was irremediably lost. In the depths of my soul I had unceasingly a fear, a terror; and from the night of my injury I had a fear of blood, a vision of blood. The various events of the day troubled me, kept me from sleeping. Some nights when, on my return with Wanzer, I had to pass through a dark passage-way, I had a shiver in my spine if the matches were slow in lighting, and I began to

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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feel my hair. My one idea was that some night or other this man would assassinate me.

This did not happen. What did happen was, on the contrary, *the thing that could not happen*. I believed that my sure destiny was to die at his hands some night, abominably; and on the contrary — but listen. That night, if Wanzer had not come to Ciro's room to search, if I had not seen the knife on the table, if some one had not come to me unexpectedly and given me the terrible push, if —

Ah, true. You are right. We are only at the beginning, and I am speaking of the end. You cannot understand if I do not tell you the whole story. Yet I am tired already; I am growing confused. I have nothing more to tell you sir. I am light-headed, light-headed; I am like a bubble full of air. I have nothing more to tell. Amen. Amen.

Come, it is gone. Thank you. You

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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are very good. You pity me. No one on earth has ever pitied me, ever. I feel better ; I can go on. I am going to speak to you of her, of Ginevra.

After the accident of the glass some of our comrades left the house ; others declared that they would remain if Giulio Wanzer was excluded. Thence it came that Wanzer received a sort of warning from the landlady. After having stormed against every one, as was his custom, he left. And that night just as I was ready to go out, he wished me to go with him, he insisted that I should follow him.

For a long time we wandered from restaurant to restaurant, coming to no decision. There was nothing more melancholy to me than meal-time, which is ordinarily an hour of rest and sometimes of forgetfulness for tired people. I scarcely ate at all, although I tried to ; the noise made by the jaws of my fellow-boarders disgusted me more and more ; formidable bull-dog jaws they had, that could have

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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crushed steel. Little by little *a thirst* was kindled within me,—that thirst which, once kindled, lasts until death.

But one night Wanzer left me free. The next day he announced that he had discovered a very pleasant place where he wanted to take me at once.

“I have the very thing. You will see; it will please you.”

In fact, the new place was perhaps better than the old one. The conditions suited me. Some of my fellow-clerks were there; several of the others were not unknown to me. I stayed. Besides, you know, it would have been impossible for me not to stay.

The first night, when they brought the soup to the table, two or three of the boarders asked at the same time with a singular vivacity, “And Ginevra? Where is Ginevra?” It was said that Ginevra was ill. Then all inquired about her illness. All manifested much uneasiness. But it was only a slight indisposition. In this



conversation, the name of the absent girl was on all their lips, pronounced in the midst of ambiguous sentences which betrayed the sensual desires that disturbed all these men, both old and young. I tried to catch the words as they flew from one end of the table to the other. Opposite me a young libertine spoke at length and with warmth of Ginevra's mouth; and he looked at me as he spoke, because I was listening with extraordinary attention. I remember that at the time my imagination formed a conception of the absent girl which differed very little from the real person whom I saw later. I always remember the significant gesture Wanzer made, and the greedy expression of his lips as he uttered in dialect an obscene thought. I remember yet, that when I went out, I already felt within me the contagion of desire for this unknown woman, and also a slight uneasiness, a certain strange, almost prophetic exaltation.

We went out together, Wanzer and I,

and a friend of Wanzer's named Doberti; the one who had spoken of her mouth. As we walked along they continued to talk between themselves of coarse pleasures, and they stopped from time to time to laugh at their leisure. I stayed a little behind them. A melancholy that was almost pain, a superabundance of obscure, confused sensations filled my heart, already so oppressed, so humiliated.

After twelve years, I can still recall that night. I have forgotten nothing, not the most insignificant details. And I *know* now, as then I *felt*, that that night decided my fate. Who sent me this warning?

Is it possible? Is it possible? A simple woman's name of three syllables opens before you an inevitable abyss, and in vain you perceive it, you know it is inevitable. Is that possible?

Presentiment, clairvoyance, inward vision — Words, nothing but words! I have read books. No, no, that is not the

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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way things happen. Have you ever examined yourself? Have you ever watched your own soul?

You suffer. Does your suffering seem new to you, never before felt? You enjoy. Does your joy seem new to you, never before felt? Error, illusion. Everything has been felt, everything has happened. Your soul is made up of a thousand, of a hundred thousand fragments of souls which have lived a complete life, which have produced all phenomena, which have witnessed all phenomena. Do you understand what I am driving at? Listen; for what I tell you is the truth, the truth discovered by some one who has spent years and years in looking constantly within himself, alone among men, always alone. Listen well; for it is a more important truth than the facts you like to know. When —

Another time? To-morrow? Why to-morrow? You do not want me to explain my thought? Ah, facts, facts,

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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always facts ! But facts are nothing, signify nothing. There is something in this world, sir, which is worth much more.

Well, here is another enigma ! Why did the real Ginevra resemble, point by point, her image which flamed in my spirit ? But we will leave that — After three or four days' absence, she appeared again, carrying in the soup, the steam from which partially veiled her face.

Yes, sir, she was a servant, and she served a table of clerks.

Have you seen her ? Did you know her ? Have you spoken to her ? Has she spoken to you ? If so, there is no doubt that you also have felt a sudden and inexplicable sensation, if you happened to touch her hand.

All men have desired her ; all do desire her, covet her ; they will covet her always. Wanzer is dead ; but she will have another lover, she will have a hundred other lovers, until her old age, until

her teeth fall out of her mouth. When she passes along the street, the prince will turn in his carriage, the man in rags will stop to look at her. In all eyes I have surprised the same light, I have seen the same obsession.

However, she is changed, much changed. Then she was twenty years old. I have often tried, without succeeding, to see her again just as she was when I saw her for the first time. There is a mystery about this. Have you never noticed it? A man, an animal, a plant, any kind of an object, shows you but once its real aspect, and that at the fugitive moment of your first perception. It is as though it gave you its virginity. Immediately after, it is no longer the same, it is something else. Your mind, your nerves, have made it undergo a transformation, a falsification, an obscuration. And to the devil with truth!

Well, I have always envied the man who looks upon this creature for the first

time. Do you understand me? No, of course you do not. You think that I am raving, that I am confused, that I contradict myself. That is nothing. Let us return to facts.

A room lighted by gas, overheated with an arid heat that dries the skin; the odor and the fumes of meats; a confused sound of voices, and above all the voices the harsh voice of Wanzer, giving to each word a brutal accent. Then from time to time, an interruption, a silence which seems to me fearful. A hand touches me, takes the plate from before me, puts another in its place, conveys to me the thrill of a caress. This thrill each one at the table feels in turn; that is evident. The heat becomes stifling, ears become inflamed, eyes shine. A low, almost bestial expression appears on the faces of those men who have eaten and drunk, who have attained the single object of their daily existence. The revelation of their impurity is a blow to me, a blow so cruel

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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that I feel like fainting. I take a firm hold of my chair; I draw in my elbows to increase the space between my neighbors and myself. A voice cries in the midst of the din, "Episcopo has the colic." Another, "No; he is playing the sentimental. Did you not see his face when Ginevra changed his plate?"

I try to laugh. I raise my eyes and I meet Ginevra's, fixed upon me with an ambiguous expression.

She leaves the room. Then Filippo Doberti makes a mocking proposition: "My friends, there is no other solution. One of us must marry her — for the sake of the others."

Those were not his exact words. He used the obscene word; he named the thing and the rôle which the others would play.

"A vote, a vote, we must choose the husband!"

"Episcopo!" Wanzer cries. "Episcopo and Company!"

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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The tumult increases. Return of Ginevra, who has perhaps heard all. She smiles with a calm and tranquil smile which makes her appear intangible.

“Ask her, Episcopo,” cries Wanzer. Two of the boarders, with feigned gravity, advance to ask in my name for Ginevra’s hand.

“I will think of it,” she answers with her habitual smile.

And again I meet her glance.

Truly I do not know whether I am the one in question or not; whether it is I of whom they speak, whether I am this Episcopo at whom they scoff. And I cannot succeed in imagining my expression at that moment —

A dream, a dream, this whole period of my life seems like a dream. You could never understand or imagine the feeling I had about myself. In a dream I seemed to live over again a phase of life already lived; I assisted at the repetition of a se-



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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ries of events that had already happened. When? No one knew. At the most I was not sure that I was myself. Often it seemed to me that I had lost my personality, and again, that it was an artificial one. What a mystery are the nerves of man!

One night Ginevra took leave of us. She announced that she did not wish to remain in service, and she left us. She said she did not feel well, that she was going to Tivoli, to remain several months with her sister. At the moment of parting every one offered her a hand. And she smilingly repeated to every one, "Au revoir, au revoir."

To me she said with a smile, "We are engaged, Monsieur Episcopo. Do not forget it."

It was the first time I had touched her, the first time I had looked in her eyes with the intention of penetrating to her heart. But she remained an enigma to me.

The next evening supper was almost lugubrious. Every one had a disappointed

air. Wanzer said, "However, Doberti's idea was not a bad one."

Whereupon some of the boarders turned upon me and made more stupid jokes.

The companionship of these imbeciles became unbearable to me; but I did not attempt to get away. I continued to frequent this house, where, in the midst of chattering and laughter, I found food for my vague, sweet fancies. During weeks and weeks, in spite of the worst sort of material embarrassment, in spite of the anxieties and terrors of my slave's life, I tasted all that is most delicate and most violent of the agonies of love. At twenty-eight years of age, a sort of unexpected and belated adolescence blossomed in my soul, with all the languors, all the tenderness, all the tears of adolescence —

Ah, sir, imagine this miracle in such a being as I was, already old, dishonored, withered to the roots. Picture to yourself a flower that comes out unexpectedly at the end of a dead branch.

Another extraordinary and sudden event stupefied and upset me. For several days Wanzer had seemed to me harder, more irritable than usual. He had spent the last five or six nights in a gambling-house. One morning he came to my room, pale as a corpse, threw himself on a chair, seemed several times to be on the point of speaking, then suddenly decided to say nothing, and went out without addressing a single word to me, without answering me, without looking at me.

I did not see him again that day. I did not see him at dinner. I did not see him the next day. While we were at table, Questori entered. He was a colleague of Wanzer's.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked. "Wanzer has run away."

At first I did not understand, or rather I was incredulous; but my heart leaped to my throat. Voices asked, "What do you say? Who has run away?"

"Wanzer, Giulio Wanzer."

Really I do not know what I felt ; but one thing is sure, my first emotion was one of joy. I made an effort to repress it. Then I heard the torrent of resentment, of rancor, of accumulated hatred against this man who had been my master.

“ And you,” cried one of the most rabid, “ you say nothing, you ? Did not Wanzer make a servant of you ? It was you, no doubt, who carried his valise to the station ? ”

Another said, “ You have been marked on the forehead by a thief. You will be rich.”

This was the way they insulted me, just for the pleasure of making me suffer, because they knew I was a coward.

I arose ; I went out. I walked the streets, wandering in search of adventure. Free, free ! I was free at last !

It was a night in March, calm, almost warm. I walked to the Four Fountains ; I sought large open spaces ; I wished to

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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drink in at a breath an immense amount of air, to gaze at the stars, to listen to the murmur of water, to do something poetic, to dream of the future. "Free, free!" I constantly repeated to myself, "I am a free man!" — I was seized with a sort of intoxication. I could not reflect yet, or collect my thoughts or examine my situation. I had foolish longings. I should have liked to do a thousand things at once, to affirm my liberty. As I passed a café, I heard a burst of music which moved me deeply. I entered, my head in the air. It seemed to me I had a bold look. I ordered cognac; I had them leave the bottle on the table; I drank two or three small glasses.

It was stifling in this café. The act of removing my hat recalled my scar, awakened the memory of the cruel phrase, "Your forehead has been marked by a thief." Imagining that every one was looking at my forehead and noticing the cut, I thought, "What will they think?"

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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They will, perhaps, believe that it is a wound received in a duel." And I, who never would have had courage to fight, took pleasure in this thought. If any one had come and sat down beside me, I should certainly have found a way of giving him an account of my duel. But no one came. A little later a gentleman entered, who took a chair opposite me on the other side of the table; he did not look at me, he did not ask permission, he did not even look to see if my feet were on the chair. It was rude, was it not?

I left; I began to walk the streets again at random. My intoxication left me all at once. Without knowing why I felt infinitely unhappy. Little by little a vague uneasiness took the place of my stupor; this uneasiness increased and suggested to me a thought: "What if *he* were in hiding somewhere in Rome? What if *he* were walking the streets in disguise? What if *he* were in the shadow of my staircase?" I was afraid; I turned two or three times

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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to see that I was not followed. I entered another café; it seemed a refuge.

Late, very late, I decided to go to my lodging. Every object, every sound, made me tremble with fear. A man lying on the sidewalk in the shadow gave me a vision of a corpse. "Oh, why did he not kill himself?" I thought. "Why did he not have the courage to commit suicide? It was the only thing for him to do." And then I saw that the news of his death would have given me more relief than that of his flight.

I slept but little, and it was a troubled sleep. But in the morning, as soon as the blinds were open, a sense of satisfaction began anew to pervade my being, — a singular feeling which you cannot understand, because you have never been a slave.

At the office I received detailed information about Wanzer's flight. There was talk of very serious irregularities and of the removal of securities from the central office of the Treasury, where he had

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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been employed for about a year. A warrant had been issued against him, but without effect. Some were sure he had already succeeded in getting to a safe place.

From that time, certain of my freedom, I lived for my love alone, for my secret. It seemed to me that I was convalescent; I had a feeling of lightness in my body; I wept with the ease of a child. The last days of March, the first of April, were filled with joys and sorrows, the memory of which, now that I am dying, consoles me for having been born.

This memory, sir, is enough to make me pardon Ciro's mother, the woman who has done me such harm. You, sir, cannot understand what it is to a man, hardened and perverted by suffering and injustice, to find revealed his own latent goodness, to discover a spring of tenderness in the depths of his own nature.

You cannot understand, perhaps cannot even believe, what I tell you. Well, I say it just the same. There are moments



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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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when, God pardon me, I feel something Christ-like within me. I have been the vilest and I have been the best of men. Come, let me weep a little. You see how my tears flow? Many years of martyrdom have taught me to weep like that, without sobs, without sighs, so that I might not be heard, might not give pain to the being who loved me, might not annoy the being who made me suffer. Very few know how to weep like that. Well, sir, that at least is one thing that I beg you to remember and give me credit for. After my death you will tell them that all his life poor Giovanni Episcopo at least knew how to weep in silence.

How did it happen that one Sunday — Palm Sunday — I found myself on the train on the road to Tivoli? Truly I have but a confused memory of it. Was it a fit of madness? Was it a case of somnambulism? I do not know. It seemed to me that I was enveloped by a strange

atmosphere which isolated me from the outside world. This sensation I had, not only in my eyes, but in my skin. I do not know how to explain it. The country, for example, that country I was crossing, seemed indefinitely distant, separated from me by an incalculable space.

How can you account for a mental state so extraordinary? All that I describe must necessarily seem to you absurd, inadmissible, contrary to nature. Just imagine that, to this day, my life has passed in this sort of disorder, in this confusion, in these anomalies, almost uninterruptedly. Paræsthesia, dysæsthesia — they have told me the names of my troubles; but no one has known how to cure them. During my whole life I have been on the verge of insanity, conscious of my condition, like the man who, leaning over an abyss, expects, from one moment to another, the supreme vertigo, the great obscurity.

How does it seem to you? Shall I lose my reason before I close my eyes?

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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Are there symptoms of it in my face, in my words? Answer me sincerely, my dear sir, answer me. And what if I should not die? If I should have to live on in an asylum with mind gone?

No, I confess it, that is not my real fear. You know—it is that they may come back, both of them, in the night. Some night Ciro will surely meet the other one; I know it; I foresee it. And—and then? an explosion of wrath, of furious passion in the darkness— My God, my God! Is it thus that I shall end?

Hallucinations, yes, nothing else. You are right. Oh, yes, yes, what you say is true. The lighting of a candle will be enough to make me rest, to make me sleep. Yes, yes; a candle, a simple candle. Thank you, sir.

Where were we? Oh, yes, at Tivoli. A penetrating stench of sulphurous water; and then on every side, olive-trees, olive-trees, groves of olive-trees; and within me

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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a strange, primitive feeling which gradually disappears as if absorbed by the breeze from the moving train. I get out. There are people in the streets; the palms are bright in the sunshine; the bells ring out. I know I am to meet her.

“Ah, Monsieur Episcopo! You here?”

It is Ginevra's voice; it is Ginevra in front of me, her hands extended. I am completely upset. She looks at me and smiles, waiting for me to manage to say something. Is it the same woman who waited on our table, in that room filled with smoke, in the glare of the gas? Is it possible that it is she?

At last I murmur something.

“But what brings you here?” she says.

“What a surprise!”

“I am here to see you.”

“You remember then that we are engaged? Here is my sister,” she adds, laughing. “Come to church with us. You will spend the day with us, won't you? You will play your part of lover? Say yes.”

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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She is gay, talkative, full of unexpected graces, full of new seductions.

She wears a simple dress, unpretentious, yet graceful, almost elegant. She asks for news of the others. "And that man Wanzer?"

She has heard all through a chance newspaper.

"You were great friends, were n't you?"

I do not answer. There is a short interval of silence, and she seems thoughtful. We enter the church, all gay with holy palms. She kneels beside her sister; she opens her prayer-book. Standing behind her, I look at her neck, and the discovery of a little brown mole gives me an unspeakable thrill. At that moment she turns a little and gives me a sidewise look from her eye.

The memory of the past disappears, anxiety for the future sleeps, there is only the present hour; there is nothing for me on this earth but this woman. Without her there is nothing for me but to die.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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As we go out, she offers me a palm. Without speaking I look at her, and it seems to me that this look makes her understand everything. We walk along to her sister's. They ask me to come up. Ginevra steps to the balcony saying, "Come here; come and enjoy the sunshine."

Here we are on the balcony, near each other. We are bathed in sunshine; the sound of bells passes over our heads. Softly, as though speaking to herself, she says, "Who would ever have thought it?"

My heart swells in boundless tenderness. I can contain myself no longer. "Are we engaged, then?" I ask, in an unrecognizable voice.

For a moment she is silent. Then softly with a slight blush she says, dropping her eyes, "Do you wish it? Well, then, let it be so."

They call to us from within. There is her brother-in-law, her other relatives. There are children. I take my rôle of

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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fiancé very seriously ! At the table I am at Ginevra's side. For one moment we press hands under the table, and I feel that I shall faint, so intense is the rapture. From time to time the brother-in-law, the sister, the relatives, look at me with curiosity mingled with amazement.

“How is it that no one has known anything about it? Why have you not spoken of it, Ginevra?”

We smile; confused, embarrassed, astonished ourselves at the event which came about with all the ease and absurdity of a dream —

Yes, absurd, incredible, ridiculous; ridiculous above all. And yet that is what happened in this world between me, Giovanni Episcopo, and the aforesaid Ginevra Canale, as I have described it, exactly as I have described it.

Ah, sir, you can laugh if you wish. I shall not be offended. *The tragic comedy*, where have I read those words? It is

true ; there is nothing more ignoble, and nothing more atrocious.

I went to pay a visit to her mother, in an old house in the Via Montanara ; I climbed a damp, narrow staircase ; a dubious greenish almost sepulchral light filtered through a small window, — the sort of thing one does not forget. I have it all in my memory ! As I went up I stopped at almost every step, because it seemed to me always that I was losing my balance, as though I had put my foot on moving ice. The farther up I went, the more this staircase with its peculiar light struck me as strange, full of mystery, full of a profound silence in which incomprehensible voices died away. Suddenly, on the upper landing, I heard a door open violently, and a torrent of abuse in a woman's voice resounded in the hall-way ; then the door closed again with a slam, which made the house shake from top to bottom. I trembled with fear, and I stood still, not knowing what to do. A man came slowly,



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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slowly, down the stairs; he seemed to slide along close to the wall like a feeble thing. He grunted and groaned under his broad-brimmed white hat. But as he knocked against me, he raised his head and I saw a pair of dark glasses, the kind that have a frame around them, enormous glasses that stood out on a face that was as red as a piece of raw meat.

The man, taking me for some acquaintance, cried, "Pietro!" He seized my arm, and I felt in my face his strong breath. But he perceived his mistake and went on down. Then I began to mount again, mechanically, and without knowing why. I was sure that I had met one of the family. I found myself facing a door on which I read, "Emilia Canale, agent of the Mont-de-Piété!" with the authorization of the Royal Questorship.

To put an end to the discomfort of uncertainty I pulled the bell-cord; but without meaning to, I pulled so hard that the bell began to ring furiously. An angry

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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voice replied from within, the same voice which had been so abusive; the door opened; and I, in a sort of panic, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, said breathlessly, "I am Episcopo, Giovanni Episcopo, clerk — I have come, you know — for your daughter — you know — I beg pardon — I rang too hard."

I was facing Ginevra's mother, — a woman still young and blooming. It was the agent herself, with her gold necklace, her two big gold ear-rings, and her gold rings on every finger. Timidly I made my proposal of marriage, — do you remember? — the famous proposal suggested by Filippo Doberti!

Ah, sir, you may smile if you wish. I shall not take offence.

Am I to tell you all, minutely, day by day, hour by hour? Do you want all the little scenes, all the trifling facts, all my life at this time, so strange, so extravagant, so comical, and so miserable, *all*, up to the great event? Do you want to laugh?

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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Do you want to cry? Nothing easier than to tell you all. I read in my past as in an open book. A great clearness comes to a man who is near his end. But I am tired, I am weak. And you too, you must be a little tired. I must cut it short.

I will. I obtained her consent without difficulty. The agent seemed to be already informed as to my business, my salary, my position. She had a resonant voice, decided gestures, a wicked, rapacious look, which was at times wheedling, almost wanton, like Ginevra's. As we stood speaking, she came close to me, she touched me constantly. At one time she would give me a little cuff, at another she would pull at one of my coat-buttons. She would brush from my shoulders a speck of dust, or pick a thread or a hair from my clothing. It was an irritation, a torture to all my nerves, to have this woman touch me; this woman whose fist I had just seen raised in her husband's face.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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For the man on the staircase, the man in the green goggles, was her husband, poor idiot!

He had been a printer, but now this trouble with his eyes prevented him from working. So he lived, a dependant on his wife, his son, and his daughter-in-law, ill-treated, tormented, looked upon as an intruder by every one. His vice was drink, the habit of drunkenness, a thirst, a terrible thirst. No one at home gave him a cent for drink; but undoubtedly in order to earn a little money, he must have secretly carried on from day to day, in no one knows what street, in no one knows what shop, for no one knows what people, some ignoble occupation. When the occasion offered he seized upon whatever he could lay hold of in the house, and ran and sold it for drink, to procure the means of satisfying his unconquerable passion; the fear of wrath or of blows was powerless to restrain him. At least once a week his wife drove him out of the house.

Then for two or three days he would not have the courage to return, or even to knock at the door. Where did he go? Where did he sleep? How did he live?

From the first day, from the day I made his acquaintance, I pleased him. While I remained seated and endured the chatter of my future mother-in-law, he came in and turned toward me with a perpetual smile which made his somewhat drooping under-lip tremble slightly, but which did not extend so far as the sort of cage in which his poor eyes were imprisoned. When I rose to go, he said to me in a low voice and with manifest fear, "I will go with you." We went out together. He was awkward on his legs. As we went down the stairs I saw that he hesitated, that he trembled, and I said to him, "Do you wish to lean on me?"

He accepted. When we reached the street, he did not take his arm from mine, in spite of the movement I made to free myself. At first he was silent; but he

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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turned to me from time to time, and brought his face so near mine that the rim of his hat touched me. He continued to smile, and as if to break the silence, accompanied his smile with a queer guttural sound. It was at dusk on a very mild night. The streets were full of people. Two musicians, with flute and guitar, were playing on the terrace of the café an air from "Norma." I remember a carriage passed carrying a wounded man escorted by two policemen.

"I am satisfied," he said at last, pressing my arm. "Truly, I am satisfied. What a good son you will be! I am already in sympathy with you, you know."

He said this almost convulsively, absorbed by one thought, one single desire, which he was ashamed to express. Then he began to laugh like an imbecile. The silence began again. Then he said once more, "I am satisfied."

And he began to laugh again, but this time spasmodically. I saw that a nervous

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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attack was affecting him, making him suffer. As we came to some windows hung with red curtains, through which blazed the light within, he suddenly said, "Shall we have a glass together?"

He stopped, held me near the door so that we stood in the patch of red reflected on the pavement. I felt that he was trembling, and the light enabled me to see his poor inflamed eyes through their glasses. "Let us go in," I said.

We entered the cabaret. The few drinkers who were there were playing cards in groups. We took our places in a corner. "A pint, red," Canale ordered.

He poured the wine into his glass with a hand which trembled like a paralytic's. He drank it at one draught, and as he passed his hands over his lips, he poured a second glass. Then placing the bottle on the table, he began to laugh and said naïvely, "It is three days since I have had a drink."

"Three days?"

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“Yes, three days. I have not a cent. At the house no one gives me anything. You understand? And I can no longer work, with my eyes. Look, my son.”

He lifted his glasses, and it was as though he had lifted a mask, so changed was the expression of his face. The lids were ulcerated, puffy, without eyelashes, matured, horrible; he could scarcely open his two tearful eyes, so infinitely sad, with the profound and incomprehensible sadness of animals who suffer. This revelation moved me to repugnance mingled with pity.

“Do they pain you much, very much?”

“Oh, my son, imagine it! Needles, needles, splinters, bits of glass, spiteful thorns,—if my eyes were pierced with all these it would be nothing in comparison.”

Perhaps he exaggerated his suffering because after such a long time, he saw himself the object of my pity, of the pity of a fellow-being! For so long he had not heard a sympathetic voice.



“It hurts you like that?”

“Yes, like that.”

Softly, softly, he wiped his eyes with a sort of rag which had neither form nor color. Then he lowered his spectacles and emptied his second glass. I drank also. He touched the bottle and said, “My son, there is nothing else in the world but that.”

I observed him. Truly nothing about him recalled Ginevra; not a line, not an expression, not a gesture, nothing. “He is not her father,” I thought.

He drank again, he ordered another pint; then he said, “I am glad that you are going to marry Ginevra. And you may be glad too. The Canales are an honest family! If we had not been honest — by this time —” Then raising his glass he smiled an ambiguous smile which troubled me, and went on, “Ginevra — Ginevra might have made our fortune if we had wished. Do you understand? These are things I may

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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say to you. Not one or two, but ten, twenty propositions, my son!" I felt myself turning green.

"Prince Altini, for example — he has been persecuting me for an eternity. Tired of the struggle, he sent for me to come to his palace one night, before Ginevra went to Tivoli. Do you understand? He would give three thousand francs down; he would open a shop for her, and so forth and so forth — But no, no, Emilia always said: 'It is not what we want; it is not what we want. We married the elder; we will also marry the younger. A clerk with a promising future, with a regular salary; we shall find such a one.' And you see! You came along. Your name is Episcopo, is it not? What a name! Madame Episcopo, then, Madame Episcopo."

He was becoming loquacious. He began to laugh. "Where did you meet her? At the boarding-place, was it not? Tell me about it; tell me, I am listening."

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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At this moment a man with a repulsive, equivocal aspect came in; he was a cross between a valet and a hair-dresser, with a pale face covered with red pimples.

“Good-day, Battista,” he said, greeting Canale. Battista spoke his name and offered him a glass of wine.

“Drink to our health, Teodoro. I present to you my future son-in-law, Ginevra’s fiancé.”

The stranger, surprised, looked at me with two pale eyes which made me shiver as though I had felt a cold and clammy touch upon my skin. “Then, sir,” he murmured, “you are —”

“Yes, yes,” replied the prattler, interrupting him; “it is Signor Episcopo.”

“Ah, Signor Episcopo — delighted — my congratulations —”

I did not open my mouth. But Battista, his chin on his breast, laughed with an air of cunning. The other soon took his leave.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“ Good-bye, Battista. I hope to see you again, Signor Episcopo.”

He offered me his hand, and I gave him my hand.

As soon as he had gone, Battista said to me in a low tone, “ Do you know who that is? Teodoro. He is the confidential man of the Marquis Aguti, the old one, the owner of the palace near by. For a year he has hung around me on Ginevra’s account. Do you understand? The old man wants her, wants her, wants her; he weeps, he cries, he stamps his feet like a baby, he wants her so much. Ha, ha, ha! poor Teodoro, how he looked! Did you see his face? He was not expecting this affair; poor Teodoro, he was hardly expecting it!”

He continued to laugh stupidly whilst I was dying with anguish. Suddenly he stopped and swore. From beneath the framework of his glasses two streams of tears flowed down his cheeks.

“Oh, my eyes! Whenever I drink, what agony!”

And again he raised his terrible green glasses; and again I had a full view of his deformed face, which looked as though the skin was gone, — red as the hind parts of certain monkeys, you know, in the menageries. Again I saw ~~those~~ two mournful eyes in the midst of the two sores. Again I saw the gesture with which he pressed that rag to his lips.

“I must go,” I said; “I have barely time.”

“Well, we will go, but wait a little.”

He began to fumble in his pockets as if in search of money. I paid. We rose; we went out. Again he put his arm in mine. It looked as though he did not intend to leave me that night. He laughed incessantly like an imbecile. And I felt in him a return of the former attack. He showed the agitation of a man who wants to say something, and who dares not, who is ashamed. Suddenly with an effort like

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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that of a stammerer stopping himself, he said, dropping his head and hiding his face with the brim of his hat, "Lend me five lire ; I will repay you."

We stopped. I put the five lire in his trembling hand. At once he turned, fled, was lost in the shadow !

Ah, sir, what a pity ! A man who is mastered by vice, a man who struggles in its clutches, who feels himself swept along, sees himself lost, yet who will not, cannot save himself. What a pity, sir, what a pity ! Do you know of anything more incomprehensible, more fascinating, more obscure ? Tell me, tell me, amongst all human things, is there one that is sadder than the terror that comes over a man in the presence of the temptation of his desperate passion ? Is there anything sadder than the trembling hands, the shaking knees, the drawn lips of a person tortured by the implacable desire for one particular sensation ? Tell me, is there anything sadder on earth ? Anything ?

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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Well, sir, from that night I felt myself bound to this wretch, I became his friend. Why? By what mysterious affinity? By what instinctive foreknowledge? Perhaps by the attraction of his misfortunes, inevitable and hopeless, like my own. After that I saw him every night. He hunted me up, no matter where I was; he waited for me at the door of my office; he waited for me in my own hallway. He asked nothing of me; he had not even the last resource of speaking with his eyes, since they were covered. But I had only to look at him to understand him. He smiled with his habitual smile, and waited, asking nothing. I had not the strength to resist, to send him off, to turn a cold shoulder to him, to speak a harsh word. Was I the slave of a new tyrant? Did Giulio Wanzer have a successor? His presence was often painful to me, horribly painful; but I did nothing to rid myself of it. He sometimes had effusions of ridiculous and distressing tenderness which wrung my heart.

“Why don’t you call me ‘papa’?” he said to me one day, making the sort of face a baby makes when on the point of crying.

I knew that he was not Ginevra’s father; I knew that his wife’s children were not his children. He himself was probably not ignorant of the fact. But I called him “papa” when no one could hear us, when we were alone, when he seemed to need consolation. He would often show me a wound, the mark of a blow, in order to move me, with the gesture that beggars use when they try to get alms by showing off their deformities.

I discovered by chance that at night he sometimes stationed himself in some obscure spot in the street, and begged in low tones, walking along for a short distance with some passer-by; I was accosted one night near Trajan’s Forum by a man who mumbled, “I am a workman out of employment. I am almost blind. I have five children who have had nothing to eat



for forty-eight hours. Give me something to buy them bread with, — bread for God's poor creatures."

I recognized his voice at once. But he, who was really almost blind, did not know me in the shadow; and I hurried on for fear of being recognized.

He did not shrink from any baseness so long as it would bring him something with which to satisfy his awful thirst. One night when he was in my room he could not sit still. I was washing my hands. I had put my coat and waistcoat on a chair, and had left my watch — a little silver watch that had belonged to my father, my dead father — in my waistcoat pocket, while I stood behind a screen. I heard Battista moving about the room in an unwonted manner, as though he were restless.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Nothing. Why?" he replied, in a changed voice and with undue haste; then he quickly joined me behind the screen.

I put on my clothes, and we went out. At the foot of the stairs I started to take out my watch to see what time it was. It was not there.

“Hello! I have left my watch upstairs in my room. I must go back. Wait here for me. I will be down in a minute.”

I ran up; I lighted a candle; I looked everywhere without success. After some moments I heard Battista's voice saying, “Well, have you found it?”

He had followed me up and stopped at the door. He was trembling slightly.

“No; it is strange. It seems to me, though, I left it in my pocket. You did not see it?”

“No.”

“Really?”

“No.”

I already had a suspicion. Battista continued to stand in the doorway, his hands in his pockets. Impatiently, almost angrily, I began to look once more.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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"I could not have lost it. I had it just before I took my clothes off; I am certain that I had it. It must be here; I must surely find it."

Battista had come nearer. Turning suddenly around, I read guilt in his face. My heart sank.

"It must be here. You will surely find it," he murmured shamefacedly. He took the candle, leaned over to search about the bed, knelt stumblingly, raised the coverings, looked under the bed. He gasped, he panted; and the candle-grease kept dripping on his uncertain hand. This comedy exasperated me.

"Enough!" I cried harshly. "Get up. Do not take so much trouble. I know where to look —"

He put the candle on the floor, remained on his knees for a moment, timid, bent, like one who is about to make a confession. But he confessed nothing. He got up painfully without a word. For the second time I read guilt in his face, for an instant

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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was angry. "He surely has my watch in his pocket ; I must force him to confess it, to give back the stolen property, to repent. I must see that he weeps tears of repentance." But I had not the courage.

"Let us go," I said.

We went out. The guilty man walked slowly, slowly, behind me down the stairs, his hand on the railing. How pitiful, how sorrowful ! When we reached the street he asked in a voice which was a mere breath, "You think, then, that it was I who took it ?"

"No, no ; do not speak of it. Good-bye ; I will leave you. I have an engagement to-night."

I turned my back upon him without a look. How sad it was !

For the next few days I did not see him. But on the evening of the fifth day he appeared at my room.

"Is that you ?" I said soberly.

And I went on with my writing without another word.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“Have you found it?” he ventured to ask after a considerable silence.

I forced a laugh and went on writing. After a long pause he spoke again.

“I did not take it,” he said.

“Yes, yes; I know. Does it still worry you?”

When he saw that I remained seated at my table he said, “Good-night, good-night, good-night.”

I let him go without an effort to keep him. Afterward I was sorry. I wished to recall him, but too late. He had gone too far. For several days he kept out of sight. Then as I was returning home quite late, a little before midnight, I met him under a gaslight. It was drizzling.

“What, you at this hour?”

He could hardly stand. I thought him drunk. But looking closer I saw that he was in a pitiable condition, covered with mud as if he had rolled in the street. He looked thin, broken, and his face was almost purple.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“What has happened to you? Tell me.”

He burst into tears, came closer, fell into my arms; then he tried to tell me the thing, stifled by his sobs, by the tears which flowed down his face.

Ah, sir, in that light, in that rain, it was terrible! How terrible the sobs of this man who had eaten nothing for three days!

Do you know hunger? Have you ever seen a man half dead from lack of food, carrying to his mouth a morsel of bread or of meat, and eating the first mouthful with poor weak teeth that are loose in his gums? Have you ever looked upon this sight? And was your heart not torn with sadness and tenderness?

True, I had not intended to talk so long of this poor devil. I have been carried along to the neglect of the rest, I know not why. But, in truth, this poor devil has been my only friend in the whole course of my existence. I have seen him

weep, and he has seen me weep more than once. In his vice I have watched the reflection of my own. Besides, we have had the same sorrows, we have suffered the same wrong, we have borne the same shame.

No ; he was not Ginevra's father. It was not his blood that flowed in the veins of this creature who did me so much harm.

How often I have thought with a restless and insatiable curiosity, of the real father, the unknown, the nameless one ! Who could he have been ? Surely not a man of the people. Certain physical refinements, certain movements of native elegance, certain cruelties, certain too complicated perfidies, and besides, her instinct for luxury, her easy scorn, a manner all her own, of wounding and stinging you in a laughing way, — all these things, and others too, revealed some few drops of aristocratic blood. Who then was her father ? Some obscure old man like the Marquis Aguti ? Perhaps —

How often I have thought of it ! At

times, too, my imagination has pictured the face of a man, not in a vague and changing, but in a decided way,—a man with a physiognomy of his own, with an expression of his own, living a life of extraordinary intensity.

Without any doubt Ginevra must know, or at least feel, that she had no blood connection with her mother's husband. The fact is, that I never succeeded in surprising in her eyes, as they looked upon this poor unfortunate, the least light of affection or even of compassion.

On the contrary, it was indifference, it was repugnance, scorn, aversion, it was even hatred that she showed as she looked at him.

Oh, those eyes ! They told everything : they told many things in a moment, too many different things ; they were my ruin. Sometimes they met mine by chance, and they had in them a look of steel, of shining and impenetrable steel. Then on a sudden a soft veil would come over them ; they



would lose their hardness. Picture to yourself, sir, a steel blade clouded by a breath.

But, no, it is impossible for me to speak to you of my love. No one will ever know how I loved her, no one. She herself never knew, does not know. But I know that she never loved me! Not for one single day, not for one single hour, not even for one single instant.

I knew it from the beginning; I knew it even while she was looking at me with that veiled look in her eyes. I had no illusions. My lips never dared frame the tender question, — the question which all lovers repeat, — “Do you love me?” And I recall that when I was at her side, when I felt within me a longing for her, more than once I have thought, “Oh, if I could only kiss her face, without her knowing that I had kissed her.”

No, no; I cannot speak to you of my love. I will tell you more facts, absurd little facts, little miseries, little shames.

The marriage was arranged. Ginevra

remained for several weeks longer at Tivoli, and I went there often by street-car. I spent half a day there, or I spent only an hour or two. I was glad to have her far from Rome. My constant fear was that one of my fellow-clerks would discover my secret. I employed no end of precautions, of subterfuges, of pretexts, of deceptions, to hide what I had done, what I was doing, what I was about to do. I deserted my usual haunts, I replied evasively to all questions; I slipped into a shop or under a *porte-cochère*, or into a cross-street, as soon as I recognized from afar one of my old acquaintances. But one day I could not escape Filippo Doberti. He caught me, stopped me, or rather grabbed me, saying, "Hello! It's a long while since I have seen you, Episcopo! What have you been doing? Have you been ill?"

I did not succeed in conquering my involuntary agitation. "Yes; I have been ill," I said without reflecting.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“That is evident; you are fairly green. But how are you living now? Where do you eat? Where do you spend your evenings?”

I answered with another lie, and evaded his glance.

“We were talking of you the other evening,” he continued. “Efrati said he had met you in Alexandrina Street, arm in arm with a drunken man.”

“With a drunken man?” I said. “Efrati was dreaming.”

Doberti burst out laughing. “Ha, ha, ha! how you blush! Decidedly you are fond of good company! Apropos, have you any news of Wanzer?”

“No; I know nothing of him.”

“What! You have not heard that he is at Buenos Ayres?”

“I know nothing.”

“Poor Episcopo! Good-bye. I’m going. Take care of yourself; take care of yourself. I see you’re down, extremely down.”

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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He turned into another street, leaving me in a state of agitation which I could not overcome. All his words on that far-away night when he had spoken of Ginevra's mouth came back to my memory ; all, exact, vibrant. And besides these, other cruder, more brutal words. I saw once more that gas-lighted room, the long table around which were seated those eating men, excited by wine, blunted by a common absorption in low thoughts. I heard the laughter, the tumult, my name on Wanzer's lips and echoed by the others ; and then the abominable words, "Episcopo and Company's house." And I thought that now this horrible thing might become a reality.

A reality, a reality ! Is such ignominy possible, then ? Is it possible that a man who, at least in appearance, is neither an idiot nor a fool, will allow himself to be dragged into such ignominy ?

Ginevra came back to Rome. The day of the wedding was fixed.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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In a carriage with her mother we made a tour of Rome in search of a small apartment, to buy the nuptial bed, to buy various indispensable articles of furniture; in a word, to make all the usual preparations. I had drawn from the bank fifteen thousand lire, which constituted all my inheritance.

Well, we made a triumphal tour of Rome in a carriage: I, reduced to nothing on the bracket seat, and the two women facing me, their knees against my knees. Whom did we not meet? Every one recognized us. Twenty times, in spite of my downcast glance, I saw from the corners of my eyes some one on the sidewalk who was trying to attract our attention. Ginevra was very gay, leaned out, turned around, saying each time, "There is Questori! There is Michele! There is Palumbo with Doberti!"

This carriage was my pillory.

The news spread. It was a source of endless amusement for my fellow-clerks,

for my fellow-boarders, for all my acquaintances. I read in their looks irony, derision, malicious hilarity, and occasionally also a kind of insulting pity. No one spared me some slur, and I smiled at each offence, with the same sort of a smile, like an impeccable automaton. Was there anything else to do? Could I get angry, become threatening, give myself up to violence, strike them, throw an ink-bottle, brandish a chair, fight a duel? Would not these things have been ridiculous, sir?

One day at the office, two "clever" fellows made up a dialogue. It was between a judge and Giovanni Episcopo. To the judge's question, "Your profession?" Giovanni Episcopo replied, "A man to whom no one shows respect."

Another day this was what I heard: "He has no blood in his veins, not a drop of blood. The little he had, Giulio Wanzel drew from his forehead. You can see there's not a drop left."

It was the truth; it was the truth.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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How did it come about that I suddenly resolved to write Ginevra and to free myself from my promise? Yes; I wrote her to break off the marriage. I myself wrote with this very hand. I posted the letter myself.

It was at night; I remember I passed and repassed the office, as agitated as a man who is on the point of committing suicide. At last I stopped, I placed the letter at the opening of the box, but it seemed to me that my fingers could not open it. How long did I stay in that position? I do not know. A policeman touching my shoulder said, "What are you doing?" I took away my fingers, I let the letter drop, and I almost fainted in the arms of the policeman.

"Tell me," I stammered, with tears in my voice, "what must I do to get it back again?"

Oh, that night! The anguish of that night! And the next morning, the visit to the new apartment, the conjugal apart-

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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ment already prepared to receive the bride and groom, and now suddenly become useless, a dead apartment! Oh, that sunshine, those rays of sunshine that lay like shining blades on all the new furniture, which still exhaled an odor of the shop, intolerable odor!

In the afternoon, towards five o'clock I met Battista as I came out of the office, and he said, "They want you at the house immediately." We walked on together. I trembled like a captured criminal.

"What can they want of me?" I asked, as if to prepare myself. Battista did not know. He shrugged his shoulders. When we reached the door, he left me. I went up stairs very slowly, regretting that I had come, as I thought of the agent's hands, those terrible hands that gave me a wild fear. When I raised my eyes and saw the door open, saw her in the doorway, ready to pounce upon me, I said hastily, "It was all a joke, a simple joke."



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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And the next week we were married. My witnesses were Enrico Efrati and Filippo Doberti. Ginevra and her mother wanted me to invite as many of my colleagues as possible to dinner, in order to astonish the population of the Via Montanara and its neighborhood. No one of the old boarders was missing.

I have a confused, vague, interrupted recollection of the ceremony, of the wedding, of the crowd, of the voices, of the uproar. Once it seemed to me that something like the ardent, impure murmurings of that other table passed around the one where we were seated. Ginevra's face was on fire, and her eyes had an extraordinary brilliancy. Around her shone many other eyes and many other smiles.

I have a memory of a heavy sadness which settled upon me, obscured my consciousness. And I can still see at the other end of the table, at an almost incredible distance, that poor Battista, drinking, drinking, drinking.

## PART II

A WEEK at least. I don't say a year, a month. But at least a week, at least the first week. But, no, nothing; nothing but misery. She did not wait a single day: immediately, even on our wedding night, she began her work of torment.

If I should live a century, I could not forget the unexpected burst of laughter which, in the obscurity of our chamber, froze me and humbled my timidity and my stupidity. In the dim light I could not see her face; but for the first time I felt all her badness in that cutting, jeering, unchaste laughter that I had never heard before, that even now I did not recognize. I felt that a venomous creature was breathing at my side.

Oh, sir, her laughter was like the poison of a viper.

Nothing, nothing, had the power to soften her: neither my silent submission nor my silent adoration; neither my sorrow nor my tears; nothing. I tried in every way to touch her heart, but in vain. Sometimes she listened to me, seriously, with grave eyes, as though she were on the point of understanding; then suddenly she would begin to laugh, with that fearful laughter, that inhuman laughter, which made her teeth gleam rather than her eyes. And I was left thunderstruck.

No, no; it is impossible. Permit me not to speak of it, sir; permit me to go on. I cannot talk of her. It is as though you were to force me to eat a bitter thing, a thing intolerably and mortally bitter. Do you not see that my mouth contorts as I speak?

One night, about two months after our marriage, she had in my presence a sort of fainting spell, — you know the usual thing, — and I, trembling with hope, having awaited in secret this revelation, this sign,

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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this fulfilment of my supreme wish, this immense joy in my distress—I fell on my knees as though in the presence of a miracle. Was it true? Was it true? Yes, she declared that it was; she confirmed it. She bore within her *a second life*.

You cannot understand. Even if you were a father you could not understand the extraordinary emotion which filled my soul. Imagine, sir, imagine a man who has suffered everything under heaven that it is possible to suffer; a man who has been beset without one moment's respite by the harsh treatment of other men; a man who has never been loved by any one, yet who has, in the depths of his being, treasures of tenderness and of goodness, treasures inexhaustible, to spend on others,—imagine, sir, the hope with which this man would await a creature of his own blood, a son, a sweet delicate being by whom he could make himself beloved!

It was in September, I remember, one of those calm golden days tinged with

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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melancholy — you know — when summer is dying. I had always dreamed of him, of *Ciro*, with joy ineffable.

One Sunday we met *Doberti* and *Questori* on the Pincian Hill. Both of them made a great ado over *Ginevra*, and joined us in our walk. *Ginevra* and *Doberti* went ahead; *Questori* and I remained behind. It seemed to me that with each step the couple ahead of us trampled upon my heart. They talked animatedly, they laughed together, and people turned around to look at them. Their words reached me only indistinctly, mingled with the sound of music, although I strained my ears to catch what they were saying. My distress was so apparent that *Questori* called to them, saying, “Not so fast, not so fast! Don’t go so far ahead! *Episcopo* will die of jealousy.”

They joked, they ridiculed me. *Doberti* and *Ginevra* continued to walk ahead, to laugh and to talk, in spite of the noise and the music, which perhaps excited and in-

toxicated them, whilst I was so unhappy that as we passed along the parapet, I had a wild thought of throwing myself suddenly down, in order instantly to put an end to such suffering. There was one moment when Questori himself was silent. I saw that he was attentively following Ginevra's silhouette, and that he too was troubled by a desire for her. Other men who met us turned two or three times to look at her, and in their eyes was the same light. It was always, always the same thing; when she passed through a crowd, foulness was in her train. It seemed to me that round about us this foulness sullied the whole atmosphere; it seemed to me that every one coveted this woman, and judged her easy to obtain; all had the same low thought lodged in their brains. Waves of music surged and grew louder; all the leaves of the trees glistened; the wagon-wheels made a deafening noise in my ears. And in the midst of this tumult, of this crowd, of this confused spectacle,

at the sight of this woman, — who in my presence was allowing herself little by little to be cajoled by this man, — and with the feeling that impurity enveloped me on every side, I thought, with a terrible pang of agony, of the little creature who was beginning to live, of the little unformed being who was perhaps at this moment suffering from the emotions of this body in which it was beginning to live.

My God, my God! How this thought made me suffer! How often it tortured me before he was born! Do you understand? The thought of his contamination — do you understand? The fault of infidelity troubled me less on my own account than for the son who was not yet born. It seemed to me that something of this shame, of this vileness, must stick to him, soil him. Do you understand my horror?

One day I showed unheard-of courage. One day when my suspicions tormented me most cruelly, I had the courage to speak.

Ginevra was at the window. I recall

it; it was a fête-day; the bells were ringing; the sun shone on the sill. Truly the sunshine is the saddest thing there is in the world. Do you not think so? The sunshine has always put suffering into my heart. In all my saddest memories there is a little sunshine, a yellow ray, as you see it in the midst of funeral trappings. When I was a child they left me for a few moments in a room where lay the body of one of my sisters, laid out on a bed surrounded by wreaths of flowers. It seems to me that I can see it yet, that poor face with its violet shadows, to which, later, *Ciro's* face in his last moments bore such a resemblance.

Ah, where was I? My sister, yes, my sister was lying on the bed among the flowers. Yes, that is what I was saying. But what was I trying to get at? Let me reflect a little. This is it. I went up to the window with a dreadful fear; it was a little window opening upon a court. The house opposite seemed to be empty :



no human voice was heard within it; the quiet was absolute. But on the roof multitudes of sparrows were making a distressing, continuous, endless chirping; and under the projecting roof, upon the gray wall, in the gray shadow, was a band of sunshine, a yellow, straight blinding ray which shone dismally with incredible intensity. I dared not turn around, I looked fixedly at the yellow line, as though under a spell; and behind me I *felt* — can you understand? — while my ears were filled with the great chirping, I *felt* behind me the frightful silence of the room, — that icy silence that reigns where the dead lie —

Ah, sir, how often have I seen again in my life that tragic band of sunshine! How often!

But what was I getting at? I was saying that Ginevra was at the window; the sun streamed into the room; on a chair lay a wreath of immortelles tied with a black ribbon. Ginevra and her mother were going to take it to Campo Verano

for the tomb of some relatives. What a memory, you will think! Yes, I have a terrible memory now.

Listen. She was eating some fruit, with that provoking sensuousness which she put into all her acts. She was paying no attention to me; she neither perceived that I was there, nor that I was looking at her. Her profound indifference had never tortured me as it did that day; I had never understood so clearly that she did not belong to me, that she was at the disposal of the first comer, that inevitably she would give herself to the first comer, and that I never should be able to establish either the right of love or the right of force. And I looked and looked at her.

Has it ever happened to you, after looking fixedly at a woman, suddenly to lose all sense of her humanity, of her social state, of the ties of affection which bind you to her, and to see, with a plainness which astounds you, the beast, the female, the brutality of sex?

That is what I saw as I looked at her ; and I understood that she was fit only for carnal acts, for some ignoble function. And another hideous truth was presented to my spirit : that the foundations of human existence, the foundations of all human anxieties, is something repulsive. Hideous, hideous truth !

Tell me what could I do about it. Nothing. But this woman was carrying another life, she was nourishing with her blood this mysterious being, — the incarnation of my constant dreams, my supreme hope, my adoration —

Yes ; before he ever saw the light I adored him, I wept tears of tenderness for him, I said in my heart unspeakable words to him. Think, sir, think of this martyrdom, — to be unable to separate an innocent being from an ignoble one ; to know that the object of your adoration is bound to a person of whose infamies you stand in dread. What would be the feeling of a fanatic who was forced

to see the sacrament at the altar covered with a filthy rag? What would be his feeling if he were forbidden to kiss the divine substance except through a soiled veil?

I cannot express it. Our words, our acts, remain always vulgar, stupid, insignificant, however grand the feeling which inspires them. That day there were within me numberless sad feelings, repressed, confused; but the result of it all was only a short cynical dialogue, a ridiculous scene, an act of cowardice. Do you want the facts, the dialogue? Here they are.

She was, as I have said, at the window, and I went up to her. For a moment I was silent. Then with a tremendous effort I took her hand and said, "Ginevra, have you already been untrue to me?"

"Untrue to you? What do you mean?"

And I said, "Have you already had a lover? Possibly Doberti."

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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She looked at me again, for I was trembling all over.

“What sort of a scene are you making? What has got into you now? Are you crazy?”

“Answer, Ginevra!”

I tried to take her hand again, but as she shrank away she cried, “Don’t bother me. I’ve had enough of it!”

But I threw myself at her feet like a maniac. I held her by the hem of her gown.

“I beg of you, I implore you, Ginevra! Have pity, have a little pity! Wait at least until the birth — of this poor creature, of my poor child! It is my child, is it not? Wait till he is born. Afterward, you shall do as you please, I will hold my tongue, I will bear everything. When your lovers come, I will go away. If you command it, I will black their boots in the next room — I will be your servant, I will be their servant; I will bear all. But wait, wait, first give me my son! Have pity!”

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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Nothing, nothing. Her look expressed only a cheerful curiosity. Drawing away, she repeated, "Are you crazy?"

Then as I continued my supplication she turned her back on me, went out, closed the door behind her, and left me there kneeling on the floor. On the floor lay the sunlight, and on the chair was that mortuary wreath. My sobs did not change the fatality of things—

Can we ever change things? Of what avail are our tears? Every man is merely a certain man, to whom certain things happen. That is all,—nothing more. Amen.

We are both tired, my dear sir,—I of talking, you of listening. In fact I have wandered a little, too much perhaps, for you know well the question is of other things. The point lies elsewhere. I must pass over ten years to reach the point,—ten years, ten centuries of sorrows, of miseries, of ignominies.

And yet the trouble was not past help.

The night I heard the shrieks of this woman in confinement — shrieks which had nothing human about them, but were the shrieks of an animal in the slaughter-house — I thought with a convulsion of my whole being, “Oh, if she would only die and leave me my living son!” Her cries were so horrible that I thought, “When one cries like that it is impossible that one should *not* die.” Yes, I had that thought, I had that hope. But she did not die; she survived for my damnation and for my son’s.

My son, he really was my son, the son of my blood. He had on his left shoulder the same mark that I have had from birth. I thank God for that mark which enabled me to know my son.

And now shall I tell you of the martyrdom of these ten years? Shall I tell it all? No; that is impossible. I should never reach the end. And besides, perhaps you would not believe me, for what we suffered is incredible.

To be brief, these are the facts. My house became an evil resort. I sometimes met strange men at my door. I did not come to do what I had said: I did not black their boots in the next room; but I soon became only an inferior sort of servant in my own house. Battista himself was less unfortunate than I, less abased. No humiliation could ever be anything compared to mine. Jcsus would have wept all his tears over me; for of all men I am the one who has touched the depths, the last depths, of humiliation. Do you understand? Battista, the wretched Battista, had reason to pity me.

During the first years, as long as Ciro did not understand, it was nothing. But when I saw that his intelligence was awakening; when I saw that in this frail and delicate being a mind was developing with astonishing rapidity; when I heard from his lips the first cruel question, — oh, then I saw that I was lost. What could I do? How could I conceal the truth from him? What



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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resource had I in my distress? I saw that I was lost.

His mother took no care of him: she forgot him during hours together; she let him want for necessary things; sometimes she even beat him. And I was forced to leave him for long hours; I could not surround him constantly with my protecting tenderness. I could not make life as sweet for him as I had dreamed, as I would have wished. The poor little creature spent nearly all his time in the kitchen with a servant.

I put him in school. In the morning I took him there, and in the afternoon at five o'clock I went after him; and after that I did not leave him until he was asleep. He soon learned to read, to write; he distanced all his comrades; he made astonishing progress. Intelligence shone in his big black eyes which lighted up his face,—eyes that were deep and melancholy. When he looked at me, I sometimes felt a kind of inward disturbance,

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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and I could not bear his look for long. Oh, often at night, at the table, when his mother was there, and silence lay heavy upon us, all my mute anguish was reflected in his pure eyes.

But the truly terrible days were yet to come. My shame became too public, the scandal too serious; Madame Episcopo quite lost her reputation. For my own part, I neglected my office-work; I made frequent errors; at times my hand trembled so I could not write. My colleagues and my superiors looked upon me as a degraded, dishonored, depraved, brutalized, ignoble man. Two or three times they gave me notice; then they took away part of my work, and finally they discharged me in the name of outraged morality.

Up to that time I had at least been worth the amount of my salary. But from that day I was not worth a rag, not even a paring thrown into the street. Nothing can give you an idea of the fury, of the animosity, with which my wife and

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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my mother-in-law tortured me. And yet they had taken from me the few thousand lire I had left; and the latter had opened at my expense a small notion shop, and on the proceeds of this her family lived.

They looked upon me as an odious consumer of victuals, and placed me on a level with Battista. It came my turn to find the door closed, to endure hunger. I tried my hand at every trade, at the lowest, most degrading forms of labor. I exerted myself from morning until night to earn a few pennies: I did copying, I ran errands, I was a prompter in an opera troupe, I was a door-keeper in a newspaper office, I was a clerk in a matrimonial bureau, I did everything that offered. I rubbed up against all sorts of people; I took all kinds of insults; I bent my neck under every yoke.

And now, tell me, after endless days of labor like this, did I not deserve a little repose, a little forgetfulness? At night, whenever I could, as soon as Ciro had

closed his eyes, I went out. Battista waited for me in the street, and we went together to some place to drink.

Rest, forgetfulness! Who has ever understood the meaning of the expression "To drown one's sorrows in wine?" Ah, sir, if I have always drank, it is because I have always felt burning within me an inextinguishable thirst; but wine has never brought me one second's enjoyment. We would sit down opposite one another, with no desire to talk. No one talked there. Were you ever in one of those silent places? The drinkers keep to themselves; they look weary; they rest their heads in the palms of their hands; in front of them is a glass, but perhaps they do not see it. Is it wine? Is it blood? Yes, sir, it is both one and the other.

Battista had become almost blind. One night as we walked along together, he stopped under a gas-jet and, feeling of his abdomen, said to me, "Do you see how swollen it is?" Then taking my hand

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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and making me feel the hardness of the swelling, he added in a voice altered by fear, "What can it be?"

For several weeks he had been in this condition, but had not mentioned it. A few days later I took him to a hospital to consult a physician. It was a tumor, or rather a collection of tumors that were growing rapidly. An operation might be performed, but Battista would not consent, although he was not at all resigned to die.

He dragged about for another month or two; then he had to go to bed and did not get up again.

What a slow, dreadful death! The pawnbroker's agent had relegated the poor unfortunate to a sort of lumber-room in an obscure and stuffy out-of-the-way corner, that she might not hear his groans. I went every day to see him, and Ciro wanted to go with me, to help me — ah, if you had seen the poor child! How courageous he was in this work of charity done by his father's side!

In order to see better, I used to light a candle-end, and Ciro held it for me. By this we would find our way to this great deformed, complaining object, who did not want to die. No, he was not merely a man stricken by disease; he was rather — how shall I put it? — he was rather disease personified, an inhuman thing, a monstrous creature alive with its own life, but to which were attached two poor human arms, two poor human legs, and a little red bald repulsive head. What a horror! And Ciro held the light while I injected morphine under the skin, so drawn that it shone like yellow marble.

But enough, enough! Peace be to that poor soul! I must come to the point and not digress any more.

Fatality! Ten years passed, — ten years of hopeless life, ten centuries of hell. Then one night at the table in Ciro's presence, Ginevra said suddenly, "Did you know Wanzer was back?"

I did not turn pale; that is sure. For

you see my face had long since taken on an unvarying color, which death itself would not alter, and which, just as it is, I shall carry with me under the ground. But I remember that my tongue refused to pronounce a word.

She transfixed me with that sharp, cutting look which always inspired me with the apprehension which the sight of a loaded weapon gives a coward. I noticed that she was looking at my forehead, at my scar, and she smiled an exasperating smile. Pointing to the gash, she said with evil intent, "You have not forgotten Wanzer in spite of the pleasant reminder he has left you?"

Then Ciro's eyes became fixed on my scar and I read in them the questions he desired to ask. He wanted to say, "What, did you not tell me that you were hurt in a fall? Why this deception? And who is this man who has marked you?"

But he dropped his eyes and said nothing. "I met him this morning," Ginevra

continued. "He recognized me at once. But I did not know him at first because he has let his beard grow. He knew nothing about us. He told me he had been looking for you for two or three days. He wants to see his dear friend again. No doubt he has made his fortune in America, if one may judge from his looks —"

As she spoke, she continued to keep her eyes on me, always with that inexplicable smile. From time to time *Ciro* looked at me; *and I felt that he felt me suffer.*

After a pause *Ginevra* added, "He is coming to-night, very soon."

Outside the rain was falling in torrents. This continuous, monotonous sound gave me the feeling of having swallowed a strong dose of quinine. I lost all sense of reality; I became wrapped in that atmosphere of isolation of which I have already spoken. I had anew a profound sense of the *priority of the actual and of the future event.* Do you understand me? It seemed to me that I was assisting at the



repetition of a series of events which had already occurred. Was this something *new* that Ginevra had told me? Was the anxiety of this waiting something *new*? Was this *new*, this uncomfortable feeling given me by my son's eyes, which with a movement that was no doubt involuntary, turned too often to my forehead, to my accursed scar? No, *not one of all these things was new*. We were silent, all three of us, around the table. Ciro's face expressed unwonted distress. There was something unusual about the silence itself, an obscure significance which my soul could not penetrate.

Suddenly the bell rang. My look met my son's. Ginevra said, "It is Wanzer; open the door."

I opened it. My members accomplished the act, but the will to do it was not mine. Wanzer entered.

Need I describe to you the scene, repeat his words? In what he said and in what he did, in what we said and in what we did, there was nothing extraordinary.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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Two old friends meet, embrace, exchange the usual questions, the usual replies. Apparently that was all.

He wore a great impervious cloak with a hood that was shiny and soaked with rain. He seemed taller, larger, more imperious than formerly. He had three or four rings on his fingers, a pin in his necktie, and a gold chain. He talked without embarrassment, like a man sure of himself. Was he really a thief returned to his country because he was now safe from prosecution?

"You have grown much older," he said to me among other things, after having examined me closely. "Madame Ginevra, on the contrary, is fresher than ever." And he examined Ginevra with half-closed eyes and a sensual smile. Already he desired her, and he was sure of possessing her.

"Speak frankly," he said. "Was it not I who arranged your marriage? Positively it was. Don't you remember?"

He began to laugh; Ginevra also; and I too, I tried to laugh. Apparently I was quite used to Battista's rôle. Poor Battista, (may God keep his soul!) had left me as his legacy this stupid, convulsive way of laughing.

Ciro continued to look at his mother, at the stranger, and at me. And when his look rested on Wanzer, there was a hardness in it that I had never before seen there.

"This child resembles you very much," Wanzer said. "He resembles you more than his mother."

He put out his hand to stroke his hair. But Ciro bounded away, evading this hand with a movement so violent, so fierce, that Wanzer was astounded.

"Ciro," cried his mother, "what manners!" and she boxed his ears soundly. "Take him away, quick; take him away," she ordered, pale with anger.

I arose; I obeyed. Ciro dropped his chin on his breast, but he did not cry. I could barely hear that he ground his teeth.

When we were in our room, I raised his head in the most caressing way possible and I saw on his poor thin cheeks the imprint of her fingers, a red mark from the blow. My tears blinded me.

“Did it hurt you, tell me, did it hurt you very much? *Ciro, *Ciro*, answer me. Did it hurt you terribly?*” I asked, leaning with despairing tenderness over his poor injured cheek, which I should have liked to bathe, not in my tears, but with I know not what precious balm.

He did not answer; he did not cry. Never, never, had I seen him with this hard, hostile, almost savage look; his brow was wrinkled, his mouth threatening, his skin livid.

“*Ciro, *Ciro*, my child, answer me!*”

He did not answer; he drew away, went to his bed, and began to undress in silence. Timidly, almost supplicatingly, I helped him. I nearly died at the thought that he had something against me too. I knelt before him to unlace his shoes, and I lingered long.

in this attitude, prostrate on the floor at his feet, placing there the offering of my heart, of a heart heavy as a lump of lead, and which, it seemed to me, could never be relieved again.

“Papa, papa!” he cried suddenly, taking my temples in his hands; and on his lips was the agonizing question.

“Speak, speak!” I implored, still kneeling at his feet.

He said no more, but got into bed, slipped under the covers, and buried his head in the pillow. A moment after, his teeth began to chatter, as they sometimes did on freezing winter mornings. My caresses did not quiet him; my words did him no good.

Ah, sir, he who has suffered what I suffered during that hour deserves heaven. Was it only one hour? At last it seemed to me that Ciro was more tranquil. He closed his eyes as if to sleep, his face gradually grew composed, his trembling ceased. I remained motionless beside the bed.

Outside, the rain continued to fall. At intervals an impetuous gust shook the window-panes; and Ciro opened his eyes wide, then closed them again.

Each time I said, "Sleep, sleep! I am here; sleep, my dear child!" But I was afraid; I was incapable of overcoming my fear. Around me, about me, I felt a terrible menace. And yet I kept repeating, "Sleep, sleep."

A sharp, piercing cry broke out above our heads. Ciro rose in his bed with a bound, and clutched my arm, breathless, terrified.

"Papa, papa, did you hear?"

We both listened, close to one another; oppressed by the same fear, we listened, we waited.

Another cry, longer, like a person being assassinated, reached us through the ceiling; then another, longer, more piercing yet, a cry that I recognized, for I had heard it before, one night long ago —

"Calm yourself; calm yourself. Do

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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not be afraid. It is a woman in labor, on the floor above; you know, Madame Bedetti. Calm yourself, Ciro. It is nothing."

But the groans, which grew more and more dreadful, continued, pierced the wall, pierced our ears. It was like the agony of an animal half-slaughtered by the butcher. I had a vision of blood.

Then, instinctively, we both covered our ears with our hands, awaiting the culmination of this agony. The groans ceased; the down-pour of rain began again. Ciro crouched underneath the covers, and once more closed his eyes. "Sleep, sleep," I said again. "I will not stir."

Some time passed thus, how much I cannot say. I was in the hands of destiny, as a victim is in the power of an inexorable conqueror. Henceforth I was lost, irretrievably lost.

"Come, Giovanni, Wanzer is going!" Ginevra's voice! I jumped; I noticed

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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that Ciro trembled also, but his eyelids did not move. He was not asleep then.

Before obeying I hesitated. Ginevra opened the door and repeated, "Come Wanzer is going."

I arose; I softly left the room, in the hope that Ciro would not be aware of my departure.

When I came again into the presence of that man, I read clearly in his eyes the impression that I made. I must have looked to him like a dying man, kept by a supernatural force upon his feet. But he had no pity for me.

He looked at me; he spoke to me as he used to. He was the master who had again found his slave. "Have they been scheming during their conversation?" was my thought. I noticed a change in them both. Ginevra's voice when she spoke to him had not the same tone as before. When her eyes rested upon him, they became veiled with that veil.



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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"It is raining so hard," she said, "you ought to call a cab."

Do you understand? She was giving me an order. Wanzer did not protest. It seemed quite natural to him that I should find a cab for him. Had he not come to take me back into his service? And I could barely stand upon my feet. Certainly they must both have seen that this was so.

Inconceivable cruelty! But what could I do? Refuse? Choose that particular moment to rebel? I might have said, "I feel ill." But I did not; I took my hat and umbrella and went out.

The gas in the stairway had been extinguished. But in the darkness I could see a multitude of lights, and in my brain strange, absurd, incoherent thoughts followed one another with lightning-like rapidity. I paused an instant going down, because in the gloom I felt the approach of madness. But it was nothing. I heard Ginevra's laugh distinctly; I heard the

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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noise made by the tenants above. I lighted a match and went on.

Just as I reached the entrance I heard Ciro's voice calling me. I turned; I went quickly up the stairs, with an ease that was to me incomprehensible.

"Back so soon?" cried Ginevra, when she saw me.

I was so out of breath I could not speak. At last I murmured in despair, "Impossible — I must go to my room — I am ill," and I ran to my son. "Did you call me?" I said quickly as I opened the door.

He was sitting up in bed and seemed to be listening. "No," he replied; "I did not call you."

But I think he did not tell the truth. "Perhaps you called me in a dream! Were you dreaming just now?"

"No; I was not dreaming."

He looked at me, disturbed, suspicious. "But what ails you?" he asked, in his turn. "Why are you so out of breath? What have you been doing?"

“Be quiet, *Ciro*!” I begged, avoiding a reply, and covering him with kisses. “Here I am beside you. I will not stir. Sleep now ; sleep.”

He fell back on the pillow with a sigh. Then to please me he closed his eyes and pretended to sleep. But after a few moments he opened them again, fixed them wide-open upon my face, and said in an indescribable tone, “He has not gone yet.”

From that night, the tragic presentiment never left me. It was a sort of vague, mysterious dread, which huddled in the depths of my being, where the light of conscience could not penetrate. Of all the internal mysteries I had discovered in myself, this remained inexplorable and seemed of all the most fearful. I kept my eye upon it; I sounded its depths with anguish, with the hope that it would be illumined by a sudden light, would be revealed to me in its completeness. Sometimes it seemed to me that I felt the *un-*

*known thing* rise, approach the region of my conscience, touch it almost, then all at once it would fall and be again plunged in shadow, leaving me in peculiar and hitherto unknown distress. Do you understand? To understand me, imagine, sir, that you stood on the edge of a well, whose depth you could not measure. This well is lighted down to a certain level by natural light; but you know that lower down, in the darkness, is concealed some unknown and terrible thing. You do not see it, but you have a feeling that it moves about. Little by little the thing rises, it comes to the very edge of the shadow, where you cannot yet distinguish it. A little more, only a little more, and you will see it. But the thing stops, drops back, keeps out of sight, and leaves you troubled, deceived, astonished.

No, no, — childishness, mere childishness. You cannot understand.

These are the facts. A few days later Wanzer took possession of my apartments,

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

---

came to live with me, was installed as a boarder; and in consequence I continued to be a slave, to tremble. Is there any need of showing you what followed? Is there any need of explaining it to you? Does anything about it seem strange to you? Shall I tell you of Ciro's suffering, his dumb, repressed anger, his bitter words, to which I should have preferred any poison, no matter what? Shall I tell you of his cries and his sobs, which suddenly broke forth in the night, and which made my hair stand on end; or of the frightful corpse-like rigidity which his body took on in bed; and of his tears, tears which sometimes began to flow without cause, one by one, from his pure wide-open eyes which never grew red or inflamed? Ah, sir, you must have seen this child weep to see how the soul weeps. We have deserved heaven. Oh, Jesus, Jesus, have we not deserved heaven?

Thank you, sir, thank you. I can go

on. Let me go on now, or I shall never get to the end. We are nearing it, you know. We are nearing it; we are there. What day is to-day? The twenty-sixth of July? Well, it was on the ninth of July, the ninth of this month. It seems like a century; it seems like yesterday.

I was in the back shop of a pharmacy, bending over my desk at work on some accounts,—exhausted by weariness and heat, eaten up by flies, sickened by the smell of drugs. It might have been three o'clock in the afternoon. I often stopped my work to think of *Ciro*, who for several days had not been as well as usual. In my heart I could see his face, grown thin by suffering and pale as a candle. Note one circumstance, sir. Through a casement in the wall behind me, and above my head, there fell a ray of sunlight.

Note also these other circumstances. A boy, a fat young fellow, was lying quietly asleep on some bags, and quantities of flies were buzzing about him, as about a carcass.

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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The proprietor, the druggist, entered and went to a corner, where there was a basin. He had the nose-bleed; and as he leaned over, in order not to spot his shirt, the blood dripped on the floor.

Several minutes passed in a silence so profound that life seemed suspended. No customer came in, no carriage passed, the boy did not snore again.

All at once I heard Ciro's voice, "Where is papa?"

And then I saw him,—in this low room, amongst the sacks and barrels and piles of soap; slender, almost diaphanous, with the look of a spirit,—I saw him appear before me like an hallucination. Beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead, his lips trembled, and he seemed to be inspired by savage energy.

"You, here, at this hour?" I cried. "What has happened?"

"Come, papa, come."

"But tell me what has happened?"

"Come; come with me."

His voice was low but resolute. I dropped everything, saying, "I will be back in a minute."

And I went out with him, unnerved, my legs shaking beneath me. Ciro took my hand.

"You do not speak? What has happened?" I asked for the third time, in spite of the fear I had of what he might say.

"Come, come with me; Wanzer is beating her—he has beaten her—" Rage strangled his voice in his throat. He seemed to be incapable of saying more. He hurried his step; he dragged me along.

"I saw it; I saw it with my own eyes," he continued. "From my room I heard loud voices, I heard words—Wanzer was abusing her, calling her all sorts of names, such names—you understand. And I saw him when he fell upon her, with clenched fists, saying, 'Take that, and that, and that!' On the face, on the breast, on the shoulders, everywhere, and



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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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so hard, so hard ! ‘ Take that and that ! ’  
And he called her all sorts of names, you  
know which ones.”

Unrecognizable this voice ; hoarse, sharp,  
interrupted by a choking that showed such  
wild hatred that I thought with terror,  
“ He will fall ; he will fall on the pavement  
from anger ! ”

He did not fall ; he continued to hasten  
his step, to drag me on in this cruel sun-  
shine.

“ Do you think that I tried to hide ?  
Do you think that I was afraid ? No, no,  
I was not afraid ; I rushed at him, I began  
to cry out at him, I seized him by the legs,  
I bit his hand — I had not the strength to  
do anything else. He threw me down,  
then he seized mamma again, and took  
her by the hair — Oh, the coward, the  
coward ! ”

The choking interrupted him. “ The  
coward, he took her by the hair, he  
dragged her to the window — he tried to  
throw her down — At last he let her go,

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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saying, 'I will leave you; if I do not, I shall kill you.' Those are his own words. And he went; he left the house — Ah, if I had only had a knife!" The choking again interrupted. We were in the Via San Basilio, which was at the time deserted. For fear that he would fall, or that I should, I said, "Stop, stop a moment, Ciro! Stop one moment here in the shade. I can go no further."

"No, we must hasten; we must get there in time — What if Wanzer were to come back to the house to kill her? Mamma was afraid; she was afraid he would come back and kill her. I heard her tell Marie to get a bag and to put some things in it for her, that she was going to leave Rome at once — was going, I think, to Tivoli — to Aunt Amelia. We must get there in time. Shall you let her go?"

He stopped, but only to look straight into my face and to await my answer. "No, no," I murmured.

“And he, shall you let him return to the house? Shall you say nothing to him? Shall you do nothing to him?”

I did not reply, and *Ciro* did not see that I was nearly dead from shame and sorrow. He did not see it, for after a short silence, in a voice which was no longer the same as a few moments before, in a voice which trembled with deep feeling, he cried unexpectedly, “Papa, papa, you are not afraid? You are not afraid of *him*, are you?”

“No, no,” I murmured.

And we continued our walk in the sunlight, across the ruined terraces of the *Villa Ludovisi*, among the drooping trees, the piles of bricks, the lime-pits which attracted and dazzled me. “Better die, better die burned alive in one of these pits,” I thought, “than to face the unknown event.” But *Ciro* had taken my hand again, and was dragging me blindly toward my destiny.

We arrived; we went up.

“Have you the key?” asked Ciro.

I had it; I opened the door. Ciro entered first. He called, “Mamma, mamma!” No answer.

“Marie!”

No answer. The house was empty, full of light and of a suspicious silence. “Already gone!” said Ciro. “What are you going to do?”

He entered the chamber. “This is the place,” he said.

There was still an overturned chair. I saw on the floor a bent pin and a red bow. Ciro, whose eyes followed mine, stooped, picked up some very long hairs, held them out to me and said, “Do you see?” His fingers and his lips trembled; but his energy was gone, his strength was weakening. I saw him tremble; I saw him faint in my arms. “Ciro, Ciro,” I cried, “my darling son!”

/ He was lifeless. I don’t know what I did to overcome the weakness which attacked me. The thought struck me,

“What if Wanzer should be coming in, now, at this very moment?” I do not know how I managed to hold the poor child, to carry him to his bed.

He regained consciousness. “You must rest,” I said. “Shall I undress you? You have a fever. I will call a doctor. Shall I undress you gently? Do you want me to?”

I spoke these words, I accomplished these acts, as though nothing were going to happen after them, as if the banalities of daily life, as if the care I gave my child, was to be that day my only business. But I felt, I knew, I was sure that it was to be otherwise, that it could not but be otherwise. One thought, one single thought, tortured my brain; one single hope, one agonizing hope, gnawed my vitals. The slow horror that had been accumulating in the depths of my being, was spreading now over the whole substance of me, was making my hair alive from its roots to its tips.

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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“Let me undress you and put you to bed,” I repeated.

“No,” he replied; “I wish to remain dressed.”

Neither his strange tone nor his peculiar words, serious as they were, prevented my constant repetition of his simple and terrible question, “*What are you going to do? What are you going to do? What are you going to do?*”

I could conceive of no possible action. It was impossible for me to make a plan, to imagine a solution, to think out either an attack or a defence. Time was passing; nothing was happening — I ought to have gone for a doctor for *Ciro*.

But would *Ciro* have consented to let me go out? Supposing he had consented, he would have been left alone. And then I might have met *Wanzer* on the stairs. And *then?* Or *Wanzer* might have returned during my absence. And *then?*

According to *Ciro*’s commands, I was not to allow *Wanzer* to come in again; I

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## EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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was to say something, do something to him. Well! I might have bolted the door on the inside, and then Wanzer could not have opened it with a key. But he would have pulled the bell, he would have knocked, he would have made a great racket. And *then*?

We waited. Ciro was lying on his bed. I was seated beside him, and I held one of his hands and felt his pulse. The beats increased with frightful rapidity.

We did not speak. We seemed to hear a thousand sounds, but it was only the tumult in our veins. We saw a background of blue through the window; the swallows dipped as they flew, as if to enter; a breath seemed to stir the curtains; there was an exact reflection of the square window on the tiled floor, and the shadows of the swallows played upon it. But these things were not real to me: they were only appearances; it was not life any more, only its simulacrum. My

very anguish seemed fanciful. How much time passed thus ?

“ I am thirsty,” *Ciro* said ; “ give me a glass of water.”

I rose to get him a drink, but the *carafe* on the table was empty. I took it, saying, “ I will fill it in the kitchen.” I left the room ; I went to the kitchen ; I put the *carafe* under the faucet.

The kitchen was next the ante-room. My ear caught distinctly the sound of a key turning in the lock. I was petrified ; *I could not move*. At last I heard the door open, and I recognized *Wanzer's* step.

“ *Ginevra !* ” he called.

No answer. He took several steps forward ; he called again, “ *Ginevra !* ” Silence. More steps. Evidently he was looking in the bedroom for her. *Still I could not move*.

Suddenly my child uttered a cry which instantly freed my rigid members. My eyes turned to a long knife which shone on the sideboard, and my hand clutched it. Prodigious strength filled my arm ; I felt



myself carried, as on a wave, to the door of my son's room ; and I saw my son clinging with feline fury to Wanzer's great body ; and I saw Wanzer's hands upon my son —

Two, three, four times, I plunged the knife into his spine up to the blade.

Ah, sir, for charity's sake do not leave me alone ! Before night falls, I will die. I promise you I will die. Then you may go ; you will close my eyes and go away. But, no, I will not even ask that ; I myself, before I die, will close my own eyes.

Look at my hand. It has touched the eyelids of that man, and it has turned yellow — Those eyelids, I wanted to close them because *Ciro* kept sitting up in bed and crying, "*Papa, papa, he is looking at me !*"

How could he have looked at him, covered as he was ? Can the dead look through sheets ?

The left eyelid resisted, cold, cold —

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EPISCOPO AND COMPANY

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How much blood ! Is it possible that a man contains a sea of blood ! The veins hardly show ; they are so delicate you can barely distinguish them. And yet — there was no place left where I could put my foot, my shoes were soaked like two sponges — strange, was it not ? — like two sponges.

One of them, so much blood ; and the other not a drop, — a lily. Oh, God, a lily ! Is there anything so white on earth ?

Lilies, only lilies !

But, look, look, sir ! What is happening to me ! What is it I feel ?

Before night falls, oh, before night —

A swallow came in.

Let it come ; let the swallow come in.









